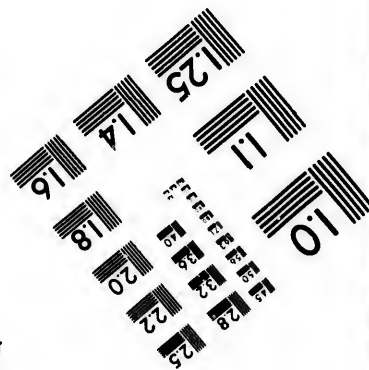
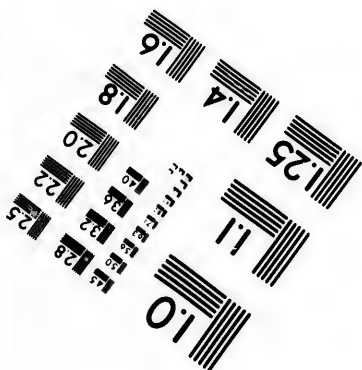
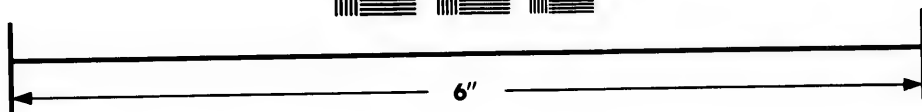
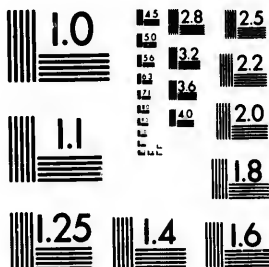


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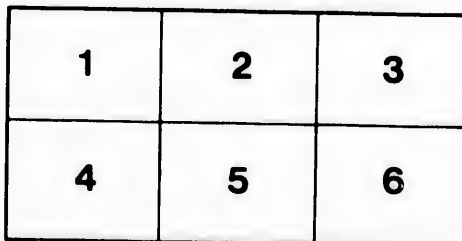
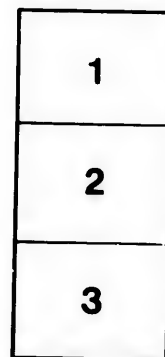
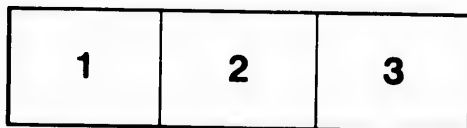
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THE

SPEECH

OF

MR. COCKE, OF TENNESSEE,

ON

THE OREGON QUESTION,

DELIVERED IN

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES, JAN. 15, 1846.

WASHINGTON:

J. & G. S. GIDEON, PRINTERS.

1846.

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PLATE B

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The House having resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole upon the state of the Union, and the following resolution, reported from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, being under consideration, to wit:

"Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President of the United States forthwith cause notice to be given to the Government of Great Britain, that the convention between the United States and Great Britain, concerning the territory of Oregon, of the 6th of August, 1827, signed at London, shall be annulled and abrogated, twelve months after the expiration of the said term of notice, conformably to the second article of the said convention of the 6th of August, 1827."

Mr. INGERSOLL proposes to amend by erasing all after the word "shall," and insert the following:

"Shall be annulled and abrogated at the expiration of the term of twelve months from and after said notice shall be given, conformably to the 2d article of the said convention of the 6th of August, 1827."

Mr. HILLIARD proposes to amend by erasing the words "forthwith cause notice to be given," and insert "be empowered, whenever in his judgment the public welfare may require it, to give notice."

Mr. COCKE, being entitled to the floor, addressed the committee, and commenced by observing that it was but yesterday when our country presented a scene of peace and prosperity which filled every American bosom with joy. We saw under our republican form of government a people prosperous and contented; the husbandman was at home in his field, enjoying the quiet happiness of rural life; the mechanic was busy in his workshop, the merchant at his books, and all was peace throughout the land. Industry received its adequate reward, and trade and enterprise, after being for years paralyzed, had regained its vigor and strength. Such had been the case when Mr. C., not ten weeks since, had left his home and set out for this place, as the representative of a gallant people. But the glorious spectacle which then filled the breast with a patriotic delight had undergone a sudden change, and all the scene was now transformed. If we looked abroad in any direction, we

beheld a dark cloud hanging with lowering and threatening aspect. The mutterings of the rising tempest are distinctly heard in the distance; and the hurried clouds and furious wind, which have been raging around us here, admonish us of its speedy approach. Yes, in that House some gentlemen were found bold enough to stand forth far beyond the line which wisdom and prudent counsels would mark out, and, baring their bosoms to the shock, had almost invoked its vengeance and defied its power.

The sound of the war bugle had fallen upon the ears of the nation like a thunder-clap in a clear sky. They had not seen the danger, nor had they anticipated its approach. Well may they ask, with painful anxiety, what does all this mean? I answer, that it has grown out of the first effort of the Executive to settle our difficulties with a foreign Power, with reference to party considerations, which Mr. C. would endeavor to notice more at length in the course of his argument.

Mr. C. had no intention to cast injurious reflections on those who had preceded him in this debate. He trusted that they had all been actuated by the purest and most patriotic motives. If he knew his own bosom, and did not mistake the impulses of his own heart, he was ready to go as far as he who went farthest to sustain the interest, and honor, and integrity of the nation. His colleague over the way, (Mr. STANTON,) who had addressed the House on yesterday, had vouched for the patriotism of gentlemen of his own political school, and seemed fondly to hope that his colleagues, who differed from him in political opinion, would exhibit the same patriotism on the present question. In this remark his colleague seemed to entertain a doubt on that point, but Mr. C. could assure him, and assure the country, that his colleagues on this side of the House, though they might differ with the honorable gentleman in their political course, were actuated by as high and patriotic motives as any gentleman on that floor. He felt that he should be unworthy to represent any portion of the gallant people of Tennessee, could he now betray a cowardly and recreant spirit, that feared to bear aloft the banner of his country. Yes, the people of Tennessee had proved their patriotic spirit in many a hard-fought battle-field, and never yet had been found wanting in maintaining the honor of their native soil. Need he allude to the various memorable spots where they had poured out their best blood in her cause? Need he name the battle-fields of the Horse-Shoe, of Talladega, and of Emucfau? There might be seen their courage and patriotism brightly manifested. Mr. C. would be unworthy to represent them could he act a cowardly part, or should he be actuated by a pitiful and dastardly spirit on a great national question like this. No; he was

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acted by no such motive. He wished not heedlessly and recklessly to approach the consideration of a question which so deeply involved the peace, prosperity, and happiness of his country. He thought they all should approach it with due deliberation, prepared to act as it became American statesmen. He had said that on the issue of this question, as it had been presented in the report of the honorable chairman from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, depended the peace of the nation. On this subject he trusted that he should be able to cite an authority which would be considered among the highest that could be adduced by gentlemen on both sides of the House.

It would be unnecessary for him, upon the present occasion, to trace the grounds of the American title to the Oregon territory; they had been placed before the country by the publication of the history of our negotiation on that subject since 1818, and the country seemed to be well apprized of every link in that chain of title by which we claimed the country. But Mr. C. was not one of those who affirmed that Great Britain had no rights in Oregon. He claimed the rights which belonged to us, and his constituents stood ready to risk their lives, their fortunes, and all they possessed to defend those rights. But Great Britain also claimed rights there which pertained to her. If those rights should be wholly denied—if nothing but the whole of Oregon would satisfy our demand, as some gentlemen had insisted, an injurious reflection would necessarily be cast upon the administrations of Mr. Monroe, Mr. Adams, and even the present Executive, as well as on a large portion of his Democratic friends in that House. He was unwilling to cast such reflections—it was not his purpose to reflect improperly upon any one—but when the question was examined, we should see where the high functionaries of the nation had placed this controversy.

Our Government upon four successive occasions has offered to divide the Oregon territory with Great Britain by the 49th parallel of north latitude. In the negotiations of 1818, 1824, and 1826 we offered Great Britain to divide Oregon with her by the 49th degree of north latitude; and on two of these occasions we had added the concession of the free navigation of the Columbia river. The venerable gentleman from Massachusetts, though now foremost in the clamor for the whole of Oregon, yet in 1818 and 1824, then intimately associated with Mr. Monroe as Secretary of State, made no opposition to the proposition to give to Great Britain one-half of the country, with all the lights before him, though now he insisted so strenuously on our right to the whole. Again, when the venerable gentleman came into the Presidential chair he offered to compromise the difficulty by adopting

the 49th parallel as a boundary. If the British Government had no rights in Oregon, I put it to the gentleman to tell the country why it was that upon these several occasions, he, as an American statesman and diplomatist, was willing to grant to a foreign Power a country to which he now seems to think our title so remarkably clear. The present Executive, through his Secretary of State, (Mr. Buchanan,) has during the past summer again repeated the offer to Great Britain of the 49th parallel, and many of his Democratic friends had not been backward in declaring that it was fair and honorable, and just in the President to go that length.

Mr. C. did not wish this great question, of so much public concern, to assume in this discussion a party character. Let us have our party dissension at home; but, in considering our foreign relations, let us soar far above mere party dictation, and look alone to the best interest of our country. It was not a subject for mere party strife; it was a national question, in the strictest sense of the term, and should be placed high above all party influences. The feelings and associations of mere party politics should not be suffered to approach it. But Mr. C. must be permitted to allude to what had been the course of some of those gentlemen who were now most clamorous for the instant abrogation of the convention of 1827, and for asserting our title to the whole of Oregon, let the consequences be what they might. He desired to refer such gentlemen to the resolutions of the Baltimore Convention in 1844, and which the Democratic party stood pledged to act upon. These resolutions declared that we must go for the whole of Oregon; this formed one prominent topic in the Baltimore Democratic creed. What had the President declared in his inaugural address? He had reiterated the principle embodied in the Baltimore resolutions. Yet, how had he acted in reference to these professions and pledges, when he had obtained possession of the Executive chair? Forgetful of the Baltimore resolutions; forgetful of the terms of his own inaugural; forgetful of those articles in the government official and in the Democratic papers of less notoriety throughout the country claiming "the whole of Oregon, or none," he had turned his back upon his own avowed principles, and had offered to cede away one-half of a territory to which, as he had since declared in his message to this House, the American title was "clear and unquestionable," and which stood upon "irrefragable facts and arguments." Such had been the history of that question; but now the whole of Oregon was claimed in the message, insisting that our title to the whole must be maintained at all hazards; and some gentlemen in that House, unmindful too of former pledges, when they had ascertained that the President had left the line of 54° 40',

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and had come down to the line of 49°, endorsed that position as a fair and equitable proposition; yet when the President refuses to stand to his offer of 49°, and returns to the principles of the Baltimore resolutions, and asserts our title to the whole of Oregon, they instantly follow, and declare that our title to the whole territory must be maintained. Yet my colleague, (Mr. STANTON,) in his speech on yesterday, remarked, in the face of the present position of the President and of many of his friends, that if Great Britain should now accept the offer of the 49th parallel, no American statesman would say our Government should not accept that compromise; indeed, such have been the sentiments of many of the friends of the Executive who have addressed this House. After the present Executive, through his Secretary of State, had offered to the British Government to give up one-half of this territory, by adopting the 49th parallel as a boundary; after that offer had been rejected by the British Minister and then withdrawn, and our title to the whole again asserted, the question presented itself in this view and no other: The President, after having offered to give away one-half of Oregon, now called upon the nation to maintain, at all hazards and by every sacrifice which courage and patriotism could prompt, our right to that portion of the country which he had himself very coolly offered to give away.

It is a little remarkable to observe what course had been pursued by some of those most conspicuous in the nation for the zeal professed by them on this Oregon question. To Mt. C. that course appeared, in no small degree, inconsistent and unaccountable. What course, for example, had been pursued by the Committee on Territories in that House two years ago, in the session of 1843? The ground assumed in their report had been, that the House of Representatives possessed no power to pass a joint resolution giving notice to England of the termination of the convention of 1827. They took ground directly against the notice, maintaining that it belonged to the treaty power, and not to the National Legislature to give it; and that the President would doubtless give the notice whenever, in his judgment, the public interest should require. Although he was not now prepared to endorse this opinion, and waiving it for the present, yet he desired to refresh the memories of gentlemen. He would take the liberty of reading an extract from the report then made by a committee, the chairman of which was the standard-bearer of the Democratic party in Tennessee:

“As to the twelve months’ notice, required to be given by the convention of 1827, the committee do not regard that as at all necessary, in order to

open the way to such action as it contemplated by this bill. The committee do not know that, for the purpose of organizing such a government as is now contemplated, it is at all important to annul or abrogate that convention. That country is large, and there is evidently room enough for the subjects and citizens of both countries in the exercise of all their enterprise in trade and commerce. All that will be required of them is to conform to the laws, and to respect the institutions which we may establish. Doing this, we shall never envy the equal participation in the benefits and advantages to be derived from a well-organized system of Government. Any possible inconvenience arising from the continuance of the convention of 1827, not now anticipated by the committee, can, and doubtless will, be looked to by the Executive, who can, at any time, abrogate the same by giving the notice contemplated in it. The giving of that notice, being a matter of treaty stipulation, belongs, perhaps, exclusively to the Executive, on whose province there is no occasion, and the committee have no inclination, to intrude."

Now, he would ask, who was the chairman who made this report to the House? It was the present Governor of Tennessee, the Hon. A. V. Brown, a prominent member of the last Congress. And of whom did the committee consist? It consisted of the Hon. Mr. Daniel, of North Carolina, the Hon. Mr. Houston, of Alabama, the present chairman of this committee, (Mr. Tibbatts, of Kentucky,) and the Hon. Mr. Wentworth, of Illinois, the same gentleman who had on yesterday spoken with so much earnestness in behalf of the notice, together with Mr. Duncan, of Ohio. Of these six gentlemen, four were now members of this House. The report contested the right of Congress to interfere with the question of notice, inasmuch as that belonged to the treaty power, and the committee had neither the right nor the inclination to infringe upon the duties of the Executive department.

[Mr. WENTWORTH here interposed, and said he had not heard the remark of the gentleman in which his name was introduced. He would thank the gentleman to repeat it.]

Mr. C. said he had named Mr. W. as one member of the Committee on Territories, in the last Congress, from which a report had been made that Congress had no power to give such a notice as that proposed, and the production of the report at the present moment did but prove the truth of the old adage, which declared that "old documents were dangerous things."

[Mr. WENTWORTH said that no man on that floor would accuse him of advocating any such doctrine. The report had been drawn up by Mr. A. V. Brown, and Mr. W. had disclaimed the position in a minority report.]

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Mr. C. said there was no minority report on file.

[Mr. WENTWORTH then requested that the extract to which the gentleman had referred might be read by the Clerk. And it was read accordingly at the Clerk's table.]

Mr. W., having listened attentively to the extract, said that it amounted to nothing more than what he had said yesterday. He had been in favor of passing the Oregon bill without the notice, or passing the notice without the Oregon bill, and that the House should take one or the other, but not take both together.]

Mr. C. Yes; but the report said that the giving of the notice belonged to the President, and not to Congress.

[Mr. W. replied, that it had been written by Mr. Brown.]

Mr. C. now resumed. Such had then been the doctrine of a leading gentleman from Tennessee, though not, as it now appeared, of the gentleman from Illinois. In the speech of the same gentleman from Tennessee, delivered on the 27th January, 1845, the same doctrine was again avowed, and further enforced. Mr. C. read from that speech the following extract:

"There might be collisions, to be sure, in joint occupation; and when they arose, they must be provided for; but the question of the probability of collision was not one which addressed itself to this House at all. That was a question for the consideration of the Executive, whether we should give the notice contemplated by the convention of 1827. Now, the Committee on Territories believed, when they reported this bill, that they were acting strictly and exclusively within the legislative powers of Congress; that they were leaving the Executive to act, when and how it pleased, with regard to giving this notice to terminate what was usually called the joint occupation of this country. That was a question with which they did not intend to interfere."

In reply to this speech, the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. Adams,) had made the following remarks:

"He would give the twelve months' notice, because, in that respect, he differed essentially from the principle advanced by the chairman of the Committee on Territories, that this House had nothing to do with the termination of the joint occupancy. On the contrary, he believed that this House had every thing to do with it, because it was war, and the war power was expressly given to Congress by the Constitution."

That was the position then taken by the venerable gentleman. In his reply he then said that the notice was war; now he says that it is not war,

but peace. He then contested the opinion of the chairman, who denied the power of the House to pass the notice, expressly upon the ground that the notice amounted to war, and, therefore, the House ought to be a party to it, because the House, by the Constitution, possessed the power of declaring war. The gentleman then sounded the note of war, insisting that Congress alone could give the notice, and that the President, without the Congress, could not give it, because Congress, and not the President, was the war-making power. At that time, according to the gentleman, to give the notice was to declare war; the notice was war. Yes, and pass this resolution or amendment, now under consideration, in the existing state of the negotiation, and carry out the recommendations of the Executive in asserting our title to the whole of the Oregon territory, and war with all its horrors will be the inevitable consequence. What was the existing state of the negotiation? We had been trying for years to settle our difficulties with Great Britain on this Oregon question, and had not succeeded. The British envoy during the last summer made us an offer, which we had rejected. Our Government then proposed again to Great Britain the forty-ninth parallel as a permanent boundary between the two Governments—an offer which was not so favorable as those we had made on two former occasions. It was refused. Whereupon our Minister, by the direction of the President, had instantly withdrawn it. This appeared to Mr. C. rather a petulant and childish act, and he had no doubt it had been done in a temporary fit of ill-temper. Where had been the necessity to withdraw it? The British envoy had not withdrawn his offer on its rejection by us, and the country was now to be involved in war for the "whole of Oregon," one half of which the President had offered to give away. The American people were always ready, if war was inevitable, to breast the storm and stand by their country right or wrong, and they would pledge united hands and hearts to its triumphant prosecution. But who did not desire that the grounds of our quarrel should be just, that we should be manifestly right before the world; because then we should have the sympathies of mankind with us; and because then we might with reason hope that the spirit of the living God—that same spirit which had graciously hovered over our arms heretofore—would again spread his wings for our defence, and inspire our armies with determined valor? He had been with us in our revolutionary struggle, and in our last contest with the same imperious Power he had again appeared for our help, and had nerved the arms of our soldiers and marshalled them on to victory. Let our cause be as just now as it had been heretofore, and

now join us in our struggle, and we shall have the same success as we had in our last contest.

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Mr. C. thought that he had shown that if the notice in its present form was
to be a party given to Great Britain, war was the inevitable consequence, unless the Ad-
ministration should abandon its present position. What was the proposition?
It was that we should terminate the convention of joint occupation. The
President asked that our rights to the whole territory should be asserted and
President, was maintained, although we had four times offered to divide the country with
man, to give Great Britain. If we should enter on the occupation of the whole territory,
pass this re- who did not see that war would be inevitable? It was so: disguise it as we
ing state of might, war with all its terrors, and all its miseries and sacrifices, would be
utive in as- the result. Such being the case, as the assertion of our right to the whole
with all its of the Oregon territory did not in his opinion involve at all the question of
ing state of the national honor, we might with great propriety look at the condition of
culties with the country and its state of preparation for war.

Mr. C. had said that this question did not involve our national honor, and
The British here let him ask gentlemen who were so clamorous upon this occasion,
ad rejected. upon what sea had Great Britain insulted our flag? When had our gallant
ninth paral- tars been impressed into her service? What American citizen had been
offer which visited with oppression by her? Point him to the time and place, show him
asions. It a single instance when such a thing had taken place, and then he was ready
President, to go as far as he who went farthest. When such a fact should be establish-
a petulant ed, he stood ready and prepared to vindicate the rights of our citizens.
emporary fit Until this should appear, he must not rashly pass the Rubicon, which once
The British passed there could be no receding. This resolution was the Rubicon; pass
the country it in its present shape, and the Government must go on at all hazards, or
ne half of must content itself to retire within the 49th parallel. Mr. C. should not
people were rashly place the country in that position.

He had said that the nation was not prepared for such a contest; and in
this position he was borne out by our past history, as well as by the present
condition of the country. Should not our Government consider well that
condition? Look at the States of the Union groaning under the weight of
heavy indebtedness they cannot meet. Did they not owe more than two-
hundred millions of dollars, the interest on which alone amounts to more
than twelve millions annually? The States were unable to discharge this
now, and when was it to be met? Pennsylvania owed forty millions; Il-
linois owed from fifteen to twenty millions, was largely indebted, and could
not even pay the interest on her liabilities. Would gentlemen, under cir-
cumstances like these, unless the honor of the nation required it, plunge

the country headlong into a wild and precipitate war? He trusted not. How was our present debt to be met? and how were we to pay the millions more which such a war would impose? Again, he repeated that our national honor not being at stake, we should, before taking such a hasty step, look well to the fearful consequences.

But what more was there in our situation which makes this so particularly inappropriate a time to enter upon a great military contest? What was at present in contemplation by a majority on that floor? The chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means was engaged in preparing a bill to reduce the existing tariff, under the professed pretext of increasing the revenue. The House had been expecting it for some time, and it would probably be brought in within a few days. The tariff of 1842 was to be largely reduced; and when that should have been done, where would be our revenue to carry on the war? The present tariff produced us some twenty-seven or twenty-eight millions, and our regular peace establishment required at least twenty-five millions of that amount. Lessen the duties, and what amount would be collected? Certainly not as much as at present, if peace should continue. But how much might be expected should we go to war? Not over five millions. War must necessarily check our commerce and prevent importations, and bring desolation and ruin on our revenue. There would at once be a deficit of twenty millions for a peace establishment, and how much more would be required for war? At least thirty millions annually. Where are we to get it? From the tariff, now to be revised and reduced? No; nor by the tariff of 1842 without reduction; nor by any other tariff. Resort must be had to direct taxation. The last resort to collect annually the sum of fifty millions by direct taxation upon the labor and toil of a people already oppressed with liabilities under the Sub-treasury system, which requires all Government dues to be collected in gold and silver, would be intolerable oppression upon the country.

Again, therefore, he insisted that, as no question of honor was involved, it would be right to pause, to look at the bearing of so great and hazardous a measure, and not rashly compromise the labor, and treasure, and peace, and blood of the nation. Gentlemen should not approach such a question like zealots, but like statesmen.

The favorite system of the gentleman from Virginia behind him (Mr. DROMGOOLE) was soon to come into view. Instead of returning again to the cursed paper system, as it had been termed, the gentleman's favorite Sub-treasury was to be held out for the adoption of the House; and all the currency of the country, at least in all Government transactions, was to con-

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trusted not exclusively of gold and silver. And how did the very learned gentleman expect that we were to get a revenue of fifty-five millions of dollars annually, to be paid in gold and silver? It was a waste of time to think of such a thing; and the attempt to exact it would impoverish the country. The gentleman's fine machine would not work, and no such monstrosity ought to be engrafted on the policy of our Government.

A gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BRINKERHOFF) had on yesterday rejoiced readily in finding himself in company with the venerable gentleman from Massachusetts on this question. He had lauded him to the skies, as other gentlemen over the way had done during this debate, who had formerly been accustomed to abuse him. Gentlemen who had lived and breathed with defamations of that venerable man upon their lips were now ready, with one accord, to place his name on the fairest page of his country's history. Mr. C. did not really know what the gentleman had done to bring him so suddenly this profusion of praises.

He said, if it was proper to give to Great Britain notice of our determination to abrogate the convention of 1827, let an additional clause be engrafted upon the resolutions, containing assurances of a friendly disposition on our part, declaring that we are ready to renew the negotiation, and settle this only question of difference between the two Governments. Such a clause accompanying the notice would tend to check the mad career of both nations. While it would show, on the one hand, that we were determined to maintain so much of our rights to Oregon as were clear and unquestionable, it would invite England to renew the negotiations in a spirit of compromise. Peace was our manifest policy. Under its mild and gentle sway, the nation had grown up from infancy to manhood, while a prosperity which increased every hour had been spread around its path. Let us persevere in the same course, yielding nothing of our rights, claiming nothing that was wrong.

Gentlemen might clamor as much as they chose for war, and do this at every little sacrifice, because it was not those who were generally most noisy for war that usually fought our battles when war came. Who was it that faced the glittering front of hostile arms? Who was it that bared his bosom to the death-shot and bayonets of the foe? Not usually those in high places, or noisy politicians. It was our gallant and hardy log-cabin boys, from the hills and from the mountains, who maintained on the bloody field the honor of their country. Mr. C. had often thought that justice never had been done to those suffering and unpretending men. They entered the tented field, and in the deadly shock of arms they fell covered with glo-

ry and with blood, and in a few hours they were thrown into a promiscuous grave, when the green sod soon covered their dust, and their names and the places of burial were forever forgotten; while he who leaped over their dead bodies and marched through their yet warm and gushing blood enjoyed all the fruits and all the glory of victory, and the poor soldier slept in the bosom of the land of his fathers and was forgotten.

And here it would not be out of place to allude for a moment to the distribution policy. He invoked gentlemen to carry that policy out, and thus to let the poor soldier know that, when he left the wife of his bosom and the pledges of love, for the sultry march to the field of death, if he fell, the his Government would educate his children. This reflection would thicken his arm him for the conflict.

In conclusion, Mr. C. inquired, who was it that would check our onward march to future greatness and glory? Under our present system of government, with wise laws and their faithful maintenance, a noble destiny awaits us—a destiny, the contemplation of which fills every American bosom with patriotic emotions. Behold this glorious galaxy of States, how beautiful they shine, cemented together as they are by the blood of our revolutionary sires. And none in this cluster shines more brightly than my own native Tennessee. Christianity herself smiles at the scene, and regards this favored country as her cherished home, as she beholds untold millions of the sons and daughters of freedom worshipping in the temple of liberty and at the altar of the living God.

But if war, that scourge of nations with which a righteous Providence punishes guilty man, was destined for our chastisement—if all negotiation and every effort for peace should finally fail, and our only honorable resort should be to the sword—then welcome war, with all its elements of destruction and death. When the voice of war shall be heard calling the brave to the field, Tennessee will be with the foremost to the rescue; and in the darkest hour of her struggle, where balls fall thickest, in the hottest of the battle, will be seen her brave and gallant sons, with strong arms and patriotic hearts, bearing aloft, amid the raging storm, our flag, with "the stars and the stripes," until the shouts of the brave and the true shall proclaim it victorious again, or until they fall and perish for the land of their fathers that cannot be saved.

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